

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 HELSINKI 001113

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [EAID](#) [SOCI](#) [FI](#) [EU](#)

SUBJECT: FINLAND: MY THOUGHTS AS I DEPART POST

11. (SBU) Summary: Finland's 2006 second-term EU Presidency offers the opportunity to strengthen trans-Atlantic ties and advance key U.S. interests. The U.S. and Finland share a broad agenda, including promoting democracy, crisis management and peacekeeping, trafficking-in-persons, and security cooperation. The creation of an American Chamber of Commerce (with more than 50 founding members) will improve prospects for U.S. firms operating in the region. Finland's participation in ePINE and interest in Ukraine allows us to coordinate anti-corruption and good governance initiatives. However, declining student and academic trans-Atlantic exchanges are exacerbating negative perceptions of the U.S. among younger Finns and threaten long-term U.S. interests in the region. It is imperative that the U.S. reverse this trend through expansion of established exchange programs and creation of new and innovative means to encourage mutual understanding and counter negative images of the U.S. End Summary.

LOOKING BACK

12. (SBU) The past 18 months have been a time of extraordinary cooperation with Finland. From the expansion of Finland's contributions in Afghanistan; to the unanticipated success of the Aceh Accords; to the creation of an American Chamber of Commerce-- we have actively and successfully pursued key USG goals. Moreover, as we approach Finland's second-term 2006 EU Presidency, there are myriad opportunities for enhanced partnership in the near future. It has been a great honor and privilege to serve my country as Ambassador to Finland. I am deeply indebted to the excellent team-- Finns and Americans-- that constitutes Embassy Helsinki. I would like to especially recognize my two DCMs, Rob Weisberg and Amy Hyatt, who provided me with outstanding support, particularly during this year's heavy rotation when approximately three-fourths of our American personnel (and most senior officers) turned over within 45 days. With the Embassy's exceptional staff and Amy's capable and competent leadership, I know I'm leaving U.S. interests in Finland in good hands.

LOOKING AHEAD

13. (SBU) Over the short-term, Finland offers us a key venue for strengthening the wider trans-Atlantic relationship and for advancing U.S. interests not only here, but continent-wide. On January 15, Finland will hold a presidential election that will almost certainly return Tarja Halonen to office. Halonen leads the left-wing of Finland's largest left-wing party and in the past has spoken out occasionally against U.S. policies. Prime Minister Vanhanen shares some of Halonen's concerns, but has been less outspoken and is a committed trans-Atlanticist. However, their skepticism toward certain U.S. policies has not translated into uncooperativeness, and we have the opportunity to build on a firm foundation of common interests. Halonen and the GoF have already proven reliable pragmatic partners for most key items in our broad, shared agenda (promoting democracy, crisis management and peacekeeping, human rights, trafficking-in-persons, and strengthening trans-Atlantic dialogue).

14. (SBU) With a Secretary-level bilateral meeting already set for Nov. 1, we should seek to facilitate a bilateral head-of-state meeting following Finland's presidential election. A cabinet-level visit to Finland in the first half of 2006 would afford the U.S. an excellent opportunity to inform GoF preparations for the second-term 2006 EU Presidency. Such high level contacts will not only highlight the importance we place on cooperating with Finland, but will provide us stronger leverage with a partner well poised to help us advance our interests within the EU. They will also allow us to weigh in early with the GoF on potential problem areas like the China arms embargo.

15. (SBU) As regards Finland's activities in the EU and further afield, the next year also presents useful opportunities. On both the governmental and non-governmental level, Finland continues to participate actively and effectively in international diplomacy, crisis mediation, and peacekeeping. While Finland's efforts in these areas have been solid, we must do more to encourage the Finns to assume a leadership role, especially with regard to Russia where Finland enjoys a special understanding of Russian culture, politics, and business relationships. During my time here, the GoF has led in certain instances where it suited domestic interests (Baltic reforms, TIP, and Turkish EU accession), but generally prefers to play a behind-the-scenes role and leave leadership to larger EU countries. Finland's upcoming EU Presidency gives us a chance to urge greater leadership from the GoF, and doing so almost certainly serves our interests. Shifting public opinion on NATO membership will be a long, arduous task, but we should reach out to those Finns who view greater participation in European security initiatives as a stepping stone to NATO membership.

16. (SBU) Finally, non-governmental Finland's role should not be ignored. Former President Ahtisaari's international mediation efforts in Aceh, Ethiopia/Eritrea, and elsewhere have met with great success (he fell only a few votes short of winning the Nobel Peace Prize), and the U.S. should do more to encourage them. Ahtisaari is soon likely to be named UN Special Envoy to Kosovo, and other prominent Finns will play leadership roles in Darfur and the Balkans. All these offer additional, important opportunities for the U.S. to advance its peace and democracy goals. I also note that the Secretary's Tribute of Appreciation to Ahtisaari generated enormous goodwill here, and encourage the Department to consider greater use of this award in similar situations in the future.

Shared Values and Vision/Solid Partnership

17. (SBU) The following sections highlight some of our more significant recent accomplishments and identify promising areas for future cooperation.

a) Intellectual Property Rights: Responding to our pressure (closely coordinated with industry leaders), the Parliament of Finland is expected to pass an Amendment to the Medicine Act that will prevent the placement of patent-infringing products on Finnish mandatory generic substitution lists. This breakthrough, a victory for the principal of intellectual property protection, levels the playing field for U.S. pharmaceutical companies and is likely to lead to long-awaited changes in other European countries. Rich, European nations must be held to the highest standards of pharmaceutical market access, lest the cost of developing new medicines be borne solely by the United States.

b) American Chamber of Commerce: I have been particularly attentive to the climate for U.S. businesses in Finland. One key achievement during my tenure has been the creation of an American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham). When I arrived in Finland, the country was the last EU member without an AmCham. Now, the AmCham is up and running with 50 founding members (at 5000 Euros each), two full-time staff, and an aggressive calendar of events. The AmCham will dramatically improve the prospects for U.S. companies operating in Finland and the EU. Another key achievement was the regional conference on REACH that the Embassy organized in June 2005. The Embassy conceived and organized this conference as a way to capitalize on Finland's role as the new seat of the EU Chemicals Agency, with the goal of mitigating the potential damage caused by this far-reaching piece of legislation.

c) ePINE: ePINE has proved to be an effective policy coordinating mechanism. U.S.-Finnish cooperation during the Belarussian and Ukraine elections is one tangible result. There are ample opportunities for additional progress in the near future. The GoF has indicated that Ukraine is its top "neighborhood" priority; a group of 20 potential investors accompanied the Prime Minister in October to Kiev, underscoring the importance Finland places on Ukrainian growth and stability. Finland hopes to use ePINE to coordinate anti-corruption and good governance initiatives in Ukraine with the U.S. and to avoid program duplication with the "Northern Dimension" and other multilateral processes. Without timely progress on corruption, the GoF is concerned Ukraine could "backslide."

d) Trafficking-in-Persons: There has been a sea change in Finland's view of and approach toward trafficking-in-persons (TIP). Over the past 18 months, the GoF has formed an inter-agency task force, hosted two international conferences, made TIP a separate criminal offense, and in September approved a new victim-centered national action plan. We augmented these actions through TIP-focused IN and VOLVIS programs, and cooperation with local NGOs. The Embassy also sponsored a series of training seminars in Finland by Los Angeles-based police captain and TIP expert Nick Senseley. We are well positioned to build on this partnership. Finland will need help implementing its action plan, particularly in successful prosecution of traffickers and border management. Professional exchanges, through VOLVIS programs or other methods, will prove very effective. The GoF also wishes to emphasize combating TIP during its EU Presidency, providing additional opportunity to work together toward shared goals.

e) Security Cooperation: We have continued to receive remarkable support from Finland for U.S. security interests around the world. The Defense Forces are working to increase their troop strength in Afghanistan to 100 personnel, and--responding to NATO's call--to Shift completely their focus from civil-military cooperation in the Kabul area, to support for the Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Likewise, Finland doubled its support for Iraqi police training in Jordan, to 10 expert trainers. Finland maintains a contingent of 550 peacekeepers under NATO command in Kosovo, and another 200 under EU command in Bosnia. We are also glad to report that Finland is steadily increasing its investment in NATO compatibility, and will allocate approximately 1 billion Euros in the next few years to building a NATO-compatible defense communications system.

f) Environment: Viewed from the North (rather than the traditional East-West axis), the U.S. and Russia are indeed next door neighbors, whose economic security and well-being are closely intertwined. In this context, we have been engaging the Finns for many years on Arctic issues. Finland continues to be an important Arctic Council partner in addressing environmental hazards in Russia. For example, Finland played a major role in facilitating a waste water treatment plant in St. Petersburg that will serve a community of more than 700,000. While much remains to be done, we have managed to eliminate many land-based pollutants. We stand to gain much from further cooperation with the Finns in areas like bio-energy and nuclear waste storage. The Finns also play a strategic role in the development of shipping technology and infrastructure to guarantee the safe transportation of Russian oil and gas (which comprise the largest reserves outside the OPEC countries) through the Baltic Sea and Arctic Ocean. The U.S. Arctic Research Commission visited Finland in March with a view toward enhanced cooperation on these issues.

THE GREATEST CHALLENGE

18. (SBU) Most of the superb cooperation between the U.S. and Finland remains invisible to the average Finn. Few Finns, for example, know that Finnish generals have twice commanded NATO brigades in the Balkans, and only by our initiative was there any press coverage when U.S. Marines came to Finland for peace-keeping training. Meanwhile, the international controversy over issues like Iraq and global warming fills newspapers here. This imbalance in information leads to an undue focus on areas of controversy and disagreement, though few in fact exist, and to a declining image of America in Finland.

19. (SBU) Finland's rich cultural life, however, offers an area of high-interest public attention where we can work to remind this country that our relationship extends far beyond security or trade issues. For example, Finland has a world-class music education system leading to a public culture in which orchestra conductors and opera singers are topics of front-page news - not gossip - articles. Its musical festivals, from heavy-metal to grand opera and everything in between, draw crowds of Finns and tourists in the summer, and every American performer who comes here, with Embassy support or independently, brings a message of American culture and society that reaches well beyond the normal circles in which we work in Helsinki. During three interviews that I gave last week to influential media sources, there was tremendous interest in American arts and culture. A senior Washington Post editor wrote recently that "Helsinki seems to be the 21st Century answer to historic Vienna." Our arts and culture can build bridges of understanding and goodwill.

10. (SBU) With that in mind, I have focused much attention on bringing fine American artists and performers to Finland, and encouraging links among our artistic communities. From young classical musicians like the Julliard orchestra, to jazz greats like Wycliffe Gordon, to the edgy art of Jeff Koons, this Embassy has demonstrated to Finland the vitality of American culture and the lively relationship that already exists between our two nations' artistic communities. For example, the Julliard orchestra premiered here a portion of a work it had commissioned for its centennial from a Finnish composer - who is himself a Julliard alumnus of half a century ago and is today Finland's most celebrated living composer. Separately, two young Finnish musicians who had studied in the U.S. programmed a summer chamber music festival including fourteen works by modern American composers - an outstanding achievement for a full season, let alone a one-week summer festival.

11. (SBU) If sustained, I am convinced that active cultural diplomacy will bring new energy to Finnish-American ties that retain a base of strength here. However, as elsewhere in Europe we must recognize that the post-WWII generation, or the legacy of those who remember that period, has already weakened and will soon be gone. As effective as cultural diplomacy can be, and as active as our relationship with Finland may be in everything from Afghanistan to waste-water treatment technology, without direct, personal experience in the other country, we face a high risk of cultural, social and - ultimately - political estrangement. However, young Finns still love and identify with many aspects of American culture. Twenty years ago, one leading high-school exchange organization sent 500 students/year to the U.S.; this year it sent 71. The long-term impact of this trend cannot be missed, or underestimated. The perception of trans-Atlantic drift will become a self-fulfilling prophecy if the trend toward fewer and fewer Finnish (and by extension, European) students visiting the U.S. and Americans visiting Finland is not stopped and reversed.

12. (SBU) This may be the greatest challenge we face in turning around negative perceptions of the U.S. I believe the State Department must do everything it can -- through the Fulbright Program, multilateral exchange programs, youth-peer exchanges, IV and VOLVIS programs, as well as through creative public-private initiatives at home and abroad -- to address the issue. The old ways of thinking about academic exchanges must be changed. It is no longer an ancillary or 'value-added' component of American diplomacy; it is a strategic tool.

MACK